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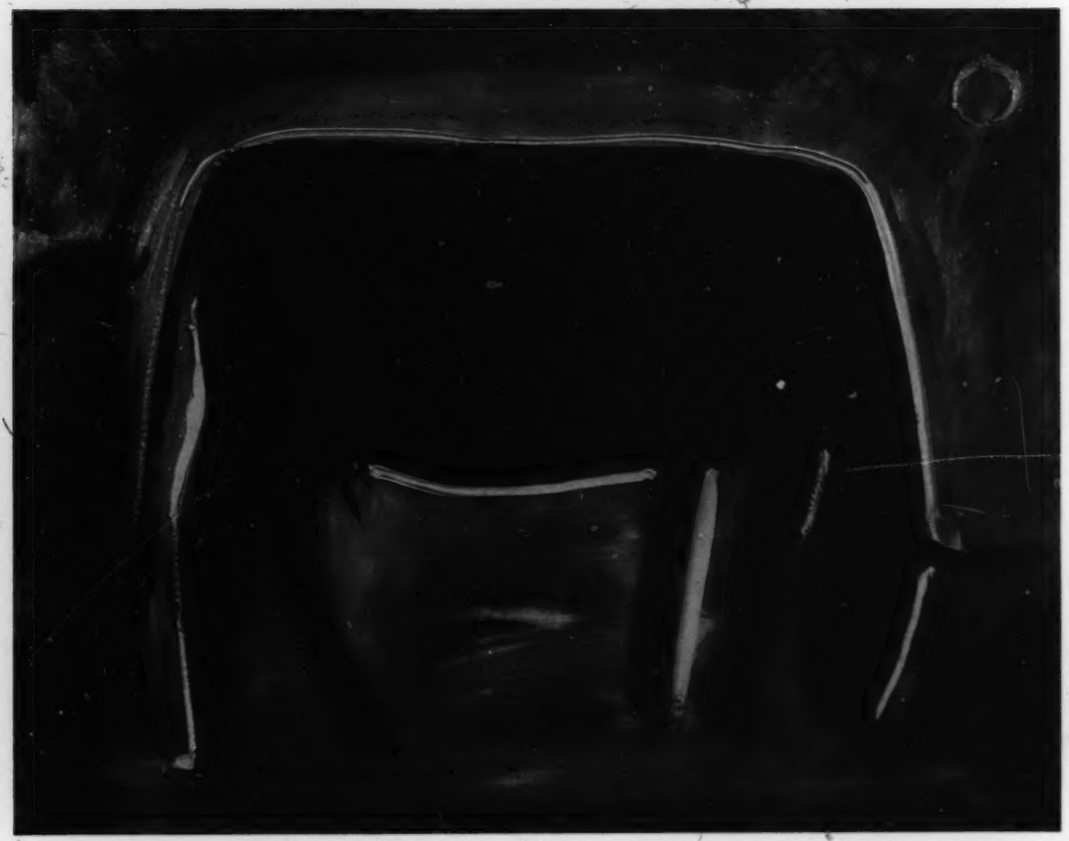
WALLACE PUTNAM



Cover 1. Purple Cow with Sun, oil, 1944
Title Page: Emblem, wash, 1975
Back Cover: From *Moby Dick Seen Again*, wash, 1973

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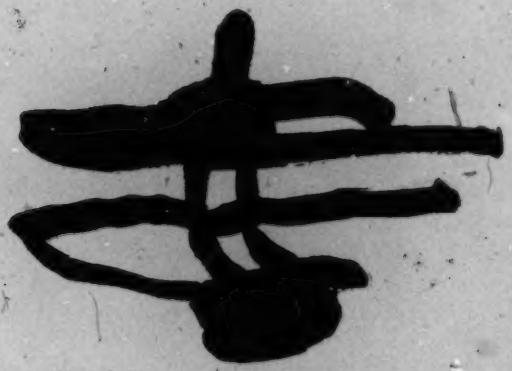
WALLACE PUTNAM



BESTIARY

PAINTINGS 1944-75

April 1 to April 19, 1975
at 789 Madison Avenue

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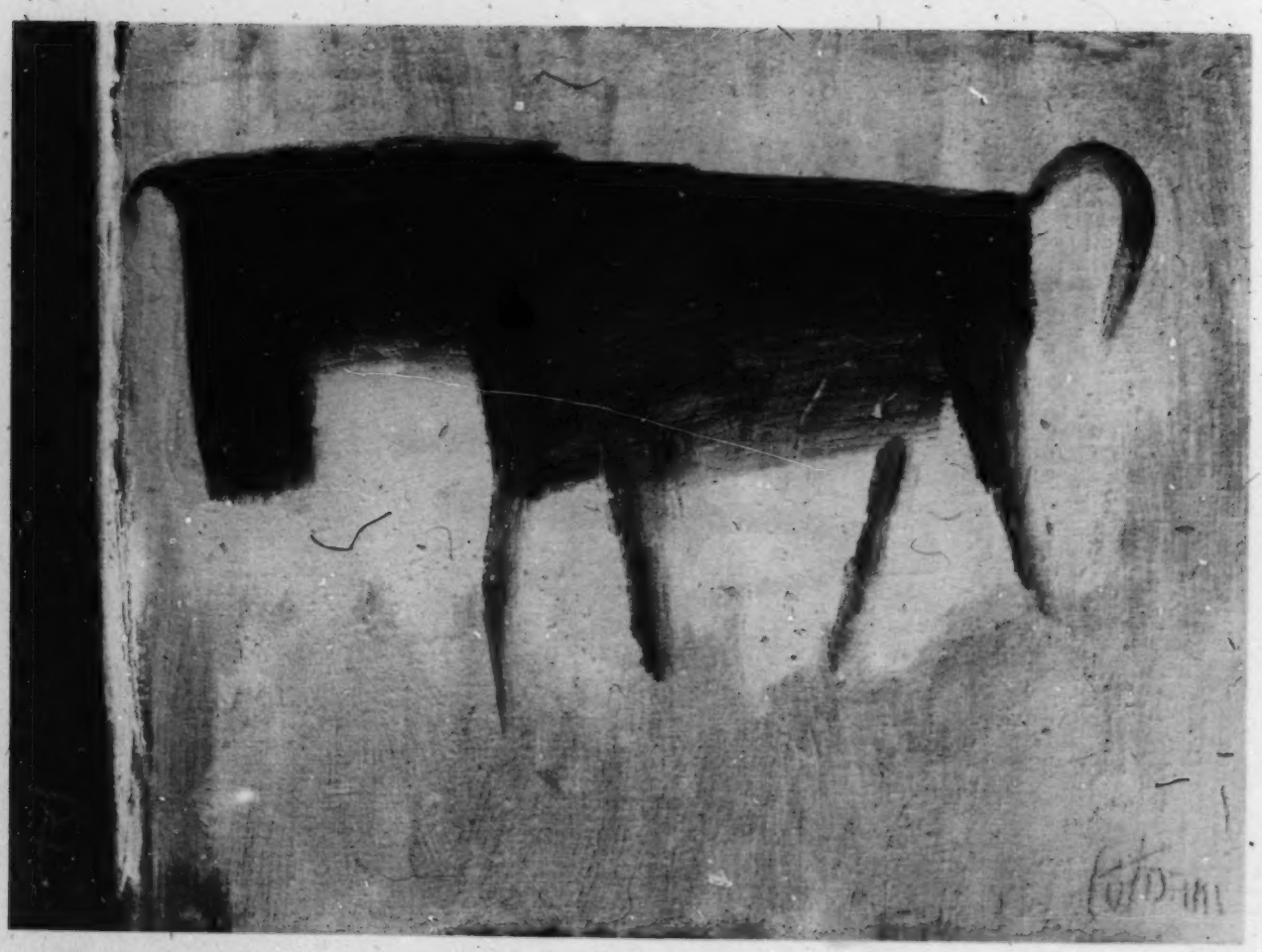


3. Equine Silhouette, oil, 1948

In dealing with Wallace Putnam's paintings of birds and beasts, we are plunging directly to the core of his work. What links Putnam's work to the generation of Abstract Expressionists, to artists as stylistically diverse as Rothko, Reinhardt, Hofmann and Pollock, is not so much the formal handling of paint and color but a certain approach to painting itself. For Putnam, painting has always been a means to go beyond the particulars of form to a universality, a oneness. In the religiosity and fervor with which he approaches his work, in his search to make painting expressive of inner feelings and thus to reveal the powers inherent in nature itself, Putnam shares the mysticism of the Abstract Expressionists. Implicit in that mysticism is the concept that the creation of art is something quite apart from sheer skill; rather it has to do with the release of energies. Through art the powers of reason can be amplified, even transcended, and nature holds the secrets of this transmigration. The source is not necessarily raw nature but nature internalized, surfacing in new forms through the artist's particular vision.

Certain ideas basic to Surrealism have coexisted in Wallace Putnam's work. The juxtaposition of images from various levels of reality and experiments with automatism have informed his paintings. He has always admired primitive art and the spontaneous art of children and his own work seeks the intuitive and inspirational. Art springing from such inner necessity is not going to proceed on a steady plane; there are going to be splendid heights and falls from a state of grace. Putnam works constantly, painting has become as inherent as breathing; "I am never more natural than when I'm painting, never more myself," he says.

In defining the shimmer of light on grasses, the particular stance of shore birds or the outline of a cow grazing, Putnam has absorbed from artists like Milton Avery and Matisse a sense of how to simplify form through an educated hand, yet how to maintain the vibrancy and luminosity of color. In Putnam's work it seems as if the world has just been born; everything is light and fresh, everything flows and moves.

Many of Putnam's best paintings come from narrative cycles. In 1964, he was working on the She-Wolf Pictograph series in which the She-Wolf acted as a threat, embodying the fierce forces of life which serve as obstacles in the Hero Journey. At that time, Putnam was immersed in the writings of Joseph Campbell with all their attendant ramifications of Jungian theory and Yoga philosophy. Most recently, Carlos Castaneda's writings have acted as a catalyst. Putnam's animals and birds are never merely humble creatures; most certainly they are not pets, they are often beings of power. They carry as much potency as the Frog Prince in the Grimm brothers' fairy tales; they can be awesome like the dog Mescalito who plays with Castaneda.

The humor of Wallace Putnam's birds and beasts should not cause us to take his iconography less seriously. Often the essence of a particular animal informs the entire structure and surface quality of the painting itself. A scurrying, shy rabbit is shown amid forms which scarcely emerge, bits of grasses, the hesitant suggestion of a flower. Or a cock crows announcing the rising sun and the entire canvas becomes a burst of solar and cosmic energy. These animals are infused with primitive and mythic content; a gray horse against a pale gray background is kin to the shadowy images in the cave at Lascaux. The understated spareness of many of these early works, those tonal paintings of the 1940s and 1950s resonant in mauves, grays and browns, result in part from Putnam's abiding interest in Oriental philosophy, particularly in Zen Buddhism.

Recently, Wallace Putnam's forms have become richer, more unrestrained; white gulls soar transparently against a blue-white sky, geese are sentinels in waters of incredible hues. Visionary colors burn as brightly as Blake's tiger. St. George dances with his dragon the continual, joyful dance of life. What was once observation and notation has now become internalized, and these paintings must be seen as celebrations of the life-force inhabiting equally all aspects of visible nature and parts of the universe which are scarcely apprehended in ordinary states of conciousness. Putnam's birds and beasts relate to the totality of existence; their vividness expresses the vitality of life itself.

- NOEL FRACKMAN

4. **Park Pigeons, oil, 1948,**

18. Six Sentinels, oil, 1967

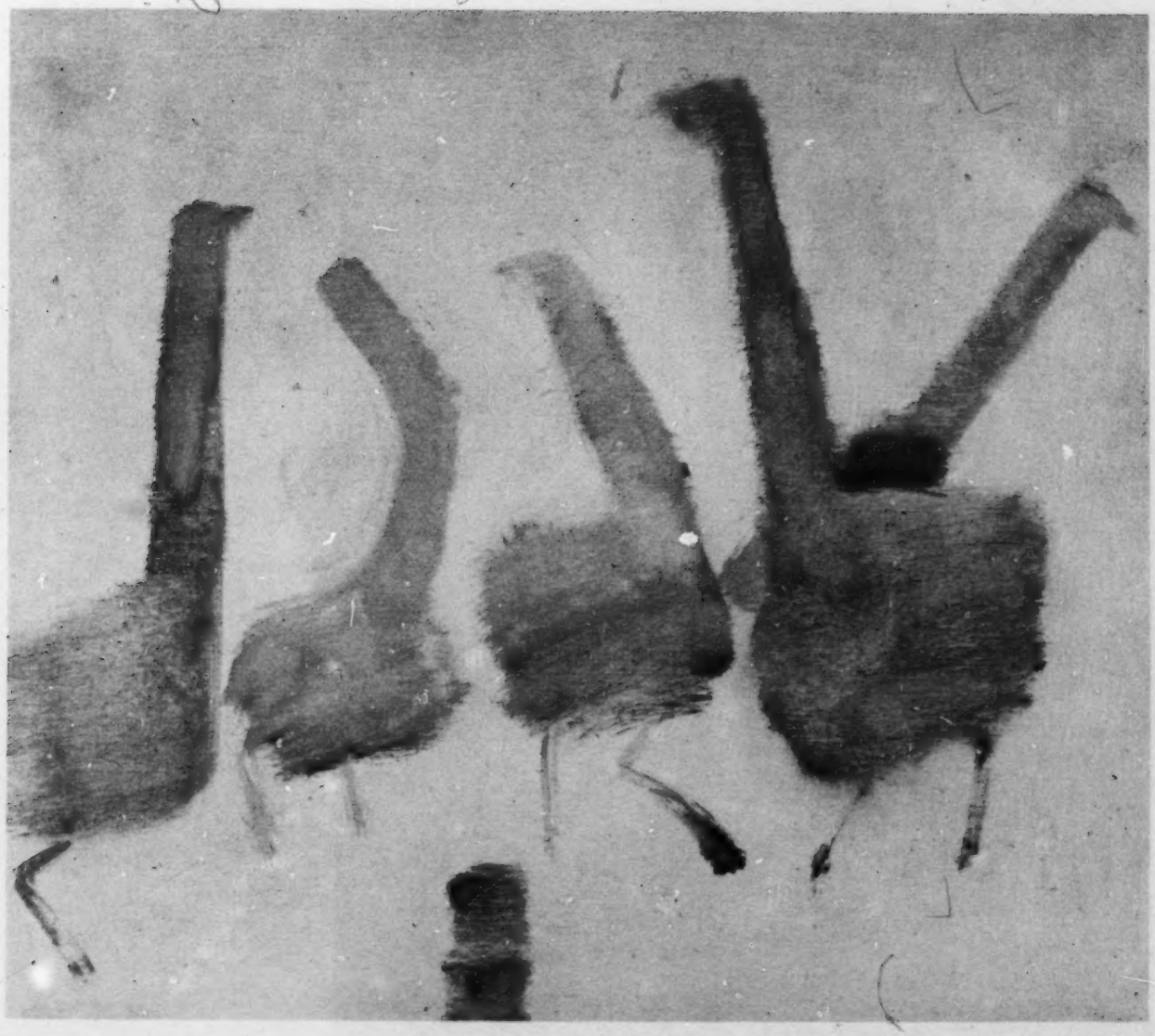
23. Blake's Tygre, oil, 1974

19. Moby Dick, oil, 1973

22. Pegasus, oil, 1974

25. **Mescalito Plays With Carlos, oil, 1975.**

17. She-Wolf, oil, 1965



10. Geese in Fog, oil, 1956

Rabbit at Dusk, oil, 1955

12. Three

n Bright Beach, oil, 1957

St. George Dancing with Dragon, oil, 1968

CATALOGUE

1. Purple Cow with Sun, oil, 1944, 31x40" (reproduced on cover)
2. Adoration, oil, 1947, 30x24"
3. Equine Silhouette, oil, 1948, 14x19"
4. Park Pigeons, oil, 1948, 50x40"
5. Wild Hen in Mist, oil, 1950, 34x25½"
6. Princess Cow, oil, 1954, 26x41"
7. Rabbit at Dusk, oil, 1955, 24x17"
8. Horse Running Downhill, oil, 1955, 29x36"
9. Four Gray Floating, oil, 1956, 15½x40¼"
10. Geese in Fog, oil, 1956, 28x24"
11. Cattle in Haze, oil, 1956, 29x36"
12. Three on Bright Beach, oil, 1957, 13x30"
13. Three Horses - Desert Sun, oil, 1963, 42x42"
14. Two Facing East and West, oil, 1964, 14x44¼"
15. Bird on Tropical Beach, oil, 1965, 50x30"
16. White Horse, oil, 1965, 48x48" (Collection Mr. & Mrs. J. Feldman, New York)
17. She-Wolf, oil, 1965, 34x50" (From She-Wolf Pictograph Series)
18. Six Sentinels, oil, 1967, 60x50"
19. Moby Dick, oil, 1973, 45x96"
20. Cock, oil, 1974, 50x44"
21. Hovering Gulls, oil, 1974, 50x60" (Private Collection, New York)
22. Pegasus, oil, 1974, 69x69"
23. Blake's Tygre, oil, 1974, 58⅛x67"
24. Fright at Night, oil, 1975, 40x50"
25. Mescalito Plays With Carlos, oil, 1975, 34x40" (From Carlos and Don Juan Series)

Original Publications

Moby Dick Seen Again, text/illustrations, Blue Moon Press, 1975 (Edition 350, signed; copies 1-60 with litho, 1-10 with drawing).

Miracle Enough, sketchbook with words, Beacon Press, 1969 (2 lithographs, Blue Moon Editions, 1972).

Sea Bird Saga, 11 lithographs signed, Editions of the Blue Moon Gallery, 1966.

Blue Moon Gallery and Lerner-Heller Gallery
New York